

## FROM FIELD AND STUDY

**Brolgas on the Lyndon River** — On 12 August, 1987, while crossing the Lyndon River on the Minilya-Exmouth road (113° 58'E, 23° 22'E), we sighted three pairs of Brolgas (*Grus rubicundus*). Two pairs were noted about 200 m west of the river crossing, slowly progressing downstream. One pair was in the river bed, which, following heavy rains the previous week, contained large pools of water. The other pair was observed feeding on the southern bank of the river. The third pair was a further 100 m downstream. Three days later the birds were still in the area, some 500 m upstream from the road crossing. The birds were identified as Brolgas, rather than the Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone*) by the characteristic darker legs and entirely grey neck.

In Western Australia the Brolga has a northern distribution, concentrated in the Kimberley. However, a number of observations have been made in the Pilbara (Storr 1984, *Rec. West. Aust. Mus. Suppl.* No. 16:22), with the most southerly record being 8 km south of Onslow. Serventy and Whittell (1976: *Birds of Western Australia*) noted that prior to the 1920's the Brolga appeared to have been confined to the Kimberley Division. Since then there has been a southern extension of the range into the Pilbara. Breeding, however, has only been recorded in the Kimberley.

Our recent sighting, some 250 km south of Onslow, represents a significant continuation of the southerly extension of the range of this crane. Surprisingly, our sighting is not the most southerly record for the species. In 1952 there was an unusual combination of circumstances which led to many species of birds characteristic of the Kimberley Division occurring in the southern part of the State. At this time Brolgas reached as far south as the Hamelin Pool region (Storr 1985, *Rec. West. Aust. Mus. Suppl.* No. 21:21). This phenomenal irruption of Kimberley species into the south occurred during a severe drought in 1951-52, following a number of good seasons.

While there was moderate winter rainfall in the Gascoyne region in 1987, the absence of similar climatic extremes to the early 1950's, and the lack of other unusual range extensions into the Gascoyne region, suggest that the occurrence of Brolgas on the Lyndon River was not a chance event, but may be heralding a continuation of the southerly spread of the species.

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